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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to supplement the relatively scant amount of information available to principals on mentoring and mentor programs for beginning teachers. Suggestions include: learning the basic principles of effective new teacher mentor programs with respect to design, implementation, and evaluation; understanding the local new teacher mentor programs operating in their schools; spreading the word about the mentor program throughout the school community; participate in mentor training in order to gain insights into the knowledge and skills necessary for successfully mentoring new teachers; supporting the role of the mentor by recognizing and acting on the need for time away from other professional responsibilities; respecting the trust and confidentiality between new teachers and mentors; integrating the mentor program with pre-existing support; and promoting realistic expectations of new teacher mentoring programs and knowing what is not reasonable to expect. The paper recommends that principals remember that even the best of mentor programs are only one part of the broader context of appropriate and high quality induction support for new teachers. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

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Reactions to this paper are invited by the author.

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Supporting Mentor Programs: Strategies for Principals

Tom Ganser • University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Mentor programs for new teachers are a common feature of professional development. Formally organized programs linking new teachers with experienced veteran teachers serving as their mentors emerged in the 1970s. The popularity of mentorship programs today can be attributed to a convergence of three important trends resulting in a dramatic influx of new teachers. The first trend is an increase, sometimes quite dramatic, in school enrollment in many parts of the United States. The second and more universal trend is the large-scale retirement of teachers hired during the 1960s and 1970s. The third trend is the promulgation of educational policies that result in smaller class size and the accompanying need for more teachers.

Although mentor programs as one strategy for supporting beginning teachers have existed for a generation of teachers, expectations for today's "second generation" programs reflect a deeper understanding of the complex and interrelated issues involved in teacher preparation, recruitment, retention, attrition, and migration.

One issue involves preparation for teaching. A far wider range of "routes" into teaching exists than was true just ten or fifteen years ago when most teachers were prepared in a four-year baccalaureate degree program. The debate over the adequacy of non-traditional preparation programs most certainly will intensify today in light of the federal requirement that all teachers be fully certified, as mandated in the "No Child Left Behind Act" passed in December 2001.

A second issue is the substantial change in the characteristics of beginning teachers. In the past most teachers were young adults who viewed teaching as a lifetime career. Today's new teachers include many more older adults who are changing career (Feistritzer, 1999). In addition, the findings of Harvard University's *New Generation of Teachers* study

(http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/) suggest that an increasing portion of adults entering the field of teaching today do so not as a lifelong career commitment but rather as a limited-time service to society (Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001).

A third issue becoming increasingly important involves the relationship between teacher recruitment and teacher retention, especially in locations where teacher turnover is great. For example, at issue is the relative attractiveness of teaching as a profession for individuals for whom many other job opportunities exist by virtue of their race or ethnicity (e.g., many fields are making concerted efforts to increase the diversity of their workforce) or their academic preparation (e.g., the short supply of mathematics, science, and technology teachers). An additional factor is the relationship between teacher "attrition," that is, the phenomenon of teachers leaving the field altogether, and teacher "migration," the situation of teachers who move from working in one school or school district to another due to a complex set of incentives and disincentives (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001).

The academic preparation of many principals serving today for the principalship paid scant attention to new teacher mentor programs and strategies for supporting beginning teachers. Moreover, principals may have little input into the design of mentor programs, programs that have evolved from a staff development "extra" to a requirement imposed by the state department of education as a condition of licensing. In Wisconsin, for example, school districts will be required to offer the services of a qualified, trained mentor to teachers issued a newly created "Initial Educator" license beginning in 2004 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to supplement the relatively scant amount of information that is available to and intended specifically for principals (e.g., Brock & Grady, 2001; Stansbury, 2001) regarding mentoring and mentor programs.

Learning About New Teacher Mentor Programs

The first step principals can take to make the most out of mentor program is to familiarize themselves with the basic principles of effective new teacher mentor programs with respect to design, implementation, and evaluation. Attending presentations and workshops offered by professional organizations can be the easiest way for principals to "come up to speed" regarding mentor programs.

Good information about mentor programs may also be available through local colleges and universities, teachers' associations, and state departments of education. A search of the Internet will quickly yield a variety of current resources. Within recent years many useful articles, books, audiotapes, and videotapes have been published about mentoring and mentor programs (e.g., Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999; Educational Leadership, 1999; Ganser,1998; Ganser & Waters, 1999; Odell & Huling, 2000; Portner, 2001). Many reports about induction, mentoring, and related issues also have been published recently. (A list of several easily accessible on-line reports is provided at the end of this article.)

Important topics for principals to understand about new teacher mentor programs include the different types of new teachers; mentor qualifications, selection, training, and support; matching mentors with new teachers; mentoring activities; and program evaluation. Many sound principles of effective new teacher mentor programs apply to any grade level, and so workshops, presentations, books, articles, and other resources intended for one grade level generally apply to other grade levels as well.

- **Understanding the Local New Teacher Mentor Program**

It is essential that principals are very familiar with the mentor program in operation in their school. Even a cursory understanding about mentor program design features reveals a host

of ways in which programs vary. This general knowledge about mentor programs can provide principals with a frame of reference for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of an existing program in their school or for formulating an informed opinion regarding the design of a new program.

Principals should know the answer to many questions about the mentor program in their school, including:

- ✔ Does the program serve only beginning teachers at the very start of their career or does it also serve experienced teachers who are new to the school?
- ✔ What are the criteria and processes used to select veteran teachers to serve as mentors?
- ✔ How are mentors assigned to new teachers?
- ✔ Are mentors provided with released time to meet with their mentees or to observe them teaching? If so, what are the arrangements to make this happen?
- ✔ How are conflicts between a mentor and mentee handled?

- **Spreading the Word About the Mentor Program**

All members of the school community should understand how a new teacher mentor program operates, especially non-mentoring veteran teachers and teachers serving in leadership positions (e.g., grade level leaders and department chairpersons). Within the school, the professional support staff (e.g., guidance counselor and school social worker), clerical staff, and maintenance staff should also understand how the mentor program works. Other groups that should know about the program include pupils and their parents, the board of education, the teachers' professional association, and the local community.

A typical weakness of many mentor programs is that the only people who really know about the program are the mentors and their mentees. Principals can offset this weakness by disseminating quality information about the mentor program wherever appropriate, and in so doing actively demonstrate their support of the program. The most obvious goal of this information is to ensure that the intended goals and operating procedures of the program are understood. A second, less apparent, goal is to showcase the program as an example of the school's commitment to supporting new teachers and minimizing a painful "sink or swim" entry into teaching that serves neither beginning teachers or their students. Principals may want to consider the following venues for "telling the story" about the mentor program:

- The orientation meeting for staff at the beginning of the year
- The school's newsletter
- The school's web site
- A presentation during a meeting of the parent-teacher organization
- A presentation to the board of education
- A display in the school or during an open house
- A talk at the meeting of local service organizations (e.g., Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary Club)
- A feature article in the community newspaper.

Principals should also ensure that information about the mentor program is a part of the interview process for hiring new teachers. Rather than slip in the topic at the end of the interview, it should be given the prominence it deserves. Principals might also consider arranging for candidates to meet with a new teacher and his or her mentor to learn about the mentor program firsthand from program participants. Candidates are likely to formulate a

positive opinion about working in a school that supports new teachers systematically through a mentor program. In the end, a school's mentor program might provide the competitive edge to sign on highly qualified candidates.

- **Participating in Mentor Training**

One of the best decisions principals can make to support the local mentor program is to participate in the training provided to mentors. By joining in the training they will also gain insights into the knowledge and skills necessary for successfully mentoring new teachers, and they will understand what effective mentors "should know and be able to do." Moreover, if the training includes discussing mentoring scenarios or role-playing activities, principals will have an opportunity to learn about the interplay among new teachers, mentors, non-mentoring veteran teachers, professional support staff, and principals related to "mentoring matters."

- **Supporting the Role of Mentor**

The heart of every successful new teacher mentor program is the relationship between mentors and their mentees. Principals can support this relationship in two important ways. The first is to act on the recognition that effective mentoring is time-intensive by freeing mentors from other professional responsibilities whenever possible. Not surprisingly, the teachers who are most qualified to serve as a mentor also are in demand for other important tasks, including curriculum development, textbook selection, leadership teams, and hiring new staff.

A second absolutely essential way for principals to support the mentoring relationship is by respecting the trust and confidentiality between new teacher and mentor. Even though mentors are often a very reliable source of information about how new teachers are faring, respecting the mentoring relationship means that principals must avoid the temptation to ask the mentor, even casually, "And, how are things going with your mentee?"

Going on record by signing a document that articulates their support of mentoring and the local mentor program ("As principal at Heartland Middle School, I will demonstrate my commitment to the Heartland Beginning Teacher Mentorship Program in the following ways . . . ") shows principals' support of and commitment to the mentor program far more convincingly than any general policy statement.

- **Integrating the Mentor Program with Pre-Existing Support**

Principals should be on the lookout for a hidden danger in many new teacher mentor programs. Mentor programs are often created without taking into account the wide variety of support mechanisms that already exist for new teachers. To avoid a wasteful duplication of services or the unintended "drifting" of pre-existing responsibilities for the well-being of new teachers to the mentor program (and, more specifically, to the mentor), principals can facilitate a ***New Teacher Support Audit*** at their school.

The first step is to brainstorm with veteran teachers, relatively new teachers, and central office personnel (e.g., staff development, human resources, curriculum and instruction) about sources of assistance for new teachers that already exist within the school and the school district, excluding a formal mentor program. The second step is to determine the sources of assistance that already exist outside of the school and school district (e.g., teachers' professional association, local or state chapters of professional organizations, consortia of schools such as "Cooperative Educational Service Agencies" in Wisconsin). The third step is to determine the relationships between these internal and external sources of assistance. The final step is to consider how a formal mentor program can be designed so as to complement these pre-existing sources of assistance. The time and effort committed to conducting a ***New Teacher Support***

Audit will enhance the likelihood that a mentor program adds value to and enhances the induction support already available to new teachers in a meaningful way.

- **Promoting Realistic Expectations**

Principals should also recognize another danger lurking in the operating of a new teacher mentor program. It is easy to attribute more power and influence to mentoring than is warranted, especially if the available financial resources for mentoring are limited (e.g., limited training and on-going support for mentors and meager provisions for enabling mentors and mentees to meet together regularly during the school day and to observe one another at work in the classroom).

Success as a teacher can be attributed to three factors. The first factor includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that new teachers bring to their work – what they already know about good teaching as they walk through the school house door and what they are able to do to put that knowledge to use. The second factor includes workplace conditions, such as the numbers and abilities of children in classes, classroom resources, and curricular and instructional support. The third factor reflects all elements of induction support for new teachers, including mentoring, but everything else as well, such as staff orientation meetings, special meetings and services for new teachers, and the all-important culture of the school as related to the transition of a new teacher from "outsider" to "insider."

Given these factors, it is critically important that principals and their staff share a common understanding about what <u>is</u> and what <u>is not</u> reasonable to expect of the new teacher mentor program. For example, if a newly hired teacher is weak in some essential skills, it is probably unreasonable and unfair to expect the mentor program and the mentor to eliminate the deficiency. Therefore, it is unwise to hire a teacher who otherwise would <u>not</u> be hired just because a new mentor program exists. Moreover, if the attrition rate among teachers in the

school is high or if there is a clear pattern of teachers "migrating" to other schools, it may be presumptuous to believe that the mentor program will be able to offset these patterns in a.y significant way. Finally, principals should not forget that even the best of mentor programs are only one part of the broader context of appropriate and high quality induction support for new teachers that enables them to "come up to speed" more quickly than if they are organizationally abandoned and left to improve their work through "trial and error."

With an effective and successful new teacher mentor program, everyone wins: the new teachers served by the program, their mentors, school and district administrators, the other members of the school community, and especially the children. By supporting mentor programs in the ways described here, school principals can maximize the unquestionable value of new teacher mentoring as a central feature of the professional learning community that they lead.

Tom Ganser (gansert@uww.edu, 262-472-1123) is Director of the Office of Field Experiences at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. He is an international speaker, facilitator, and consultant in the design, implementation, and evaluation of new teacher mentor programs.

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Mentor Program Design
Mentor Training and Support
Sharing Workshops for New Teachers

Tom began his career in education as a high school English teacher in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for 10 1/2 years. He has served as a consultant for organizations in Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Sweden. He has trained mentors for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, for school districts and Cooperative Educational Service Agencies in Wisconsin, for the Baltimore (Maryland) County Public Schools, and for the Ministry of Education in Bermuda. In addition, Tom has facilitated Sharing Workshops for New Teachers at conventions and conferences, and for school districts.

Tom has specialized in mentoring and mentor programs for new teachers since 1989. He has made presentations at meetings of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Educational Research Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Association of Teacher Educators, International Mentoring Association, Joint Board for Teacher Education (the Bahamas, Belize and Jamaica), Kappa Delta Pi, Mid-Western Educational Research Association, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Council for the Social Studies, National Council of Teachers of English, National Education Association, National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, National School Board Association, National Staff Development Council, and Performance Institute.

Tom's articles have appeared in many publications, including *A Better Beginning: Supporting and Mentoring New Teachers, Clearing House, Contemporary Education, Educational Forum, Journal of Staff Development, Kappa Delta Pi Record, Mentoring & Tutoring, National Association of Elementary School Principals Streamlined Seminar, National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin* and *Practitioner, The High School Magazine, New Teacher Advocate, Principal, Schools in the Middle*, and *The Teacher Educator*. Many of his conference papers are accessible through the U. S. Department of Education ERIC system. In recent years, Tom has been interviewed by reporters from the ***Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel***, ***Washington Post***, ***U.S. News & World Report***, and ***Catalyst for Cleveland Schools*** about mentoring and mentoring programs.

Tom is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and directs the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater *Beginning Teacher Assistance Program*. From 1990 to 2000, the program was offered as a service to local school districts. Today, the program focuses on building the capacity of school districts to design, implement, and evaluate their own mentor program for new teachers and other school employees. (April, 2002)

Selected list of organizations for which Tom Ganser has provided consulting services or facilitated training or workshops on the topics of beginning teaching, mentoring, and mentor program design, implementation, and evaluation

Wisconsin School Districts

Altoona (1999)
Beloit (1999)
Bristol (1999-2001)
Central High School of Westosha (2001-02)
Cudahy (2001)
Elmbrook (1996-1999)
Janesville (1999)
Lake Country (1999, 2000)
Lake Mills (1996, 1998, 2000-2001)
Merton (1999-2000)
Milwaukee (1992)
Salem (1999-2001)
Swallow (1999-2001)
Waterloo (1999-2001)
West Allis, West Milwaukee, et al., (1998)
West Bend (2001)
West DePere (2001)
Wisconsin Dells (2001-02)
Whitewater (1995, 2000-2001)

Other Wisconsin Organizations

CESA No. 2/Dane County (2000)
CESA No. 3 (1991)
CESA No. 4 (1999)
CESA No. 5 (1999-2002)
CESA No. 6 (1991)
CESA No. 9 (1999)
CESA No. 10 (1991, 1999)
CESA No. 11 (1992)
Diocese of Green Bay (1998)
Marathon County Special Education (1999)
Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (1987-1988, 1992)
University of Wisconsin-River Falls (1993)
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater/Continuing Education Services (2000-2002)
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater *Early Childhood Conference* (1998)
Wisconsin Association of Teacher Educators (1996)
Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies (1994)
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2000-2001)
Wisconsin Education Association Council (state teacher's convention) (1994-2001)
Wisconsin Improvement Program (1995-1996, 1998, 2000)
Wisconsin State Mentoring Conference (1998-1999)

Organizations Outside Wisconsin

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1998, 2001)
Baltimore (Maryland) Country Public Schools (1998)
Bermuda, Ministry of Education (1997, 2000)
Illinois Association of Teacher Educators, Illinois State Board of Education, Partnership for Professional Development (2002)
Jamaica Teachers' Association (2001)
Joint Board of Teacher Education (the Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica) (2000)
Kappa Delta Pi International (1995)
Kane County, Illinois (1998)
Kansas National Education Association (2000)
Mentoring Leadership and Resource Network (1994)
National Association of Secondary School Principals (1998)
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (1997)
National Education Association (2001-02)
Nat'l Foundation for the Improvement of Teaching (1999)
National Staff Development Council (1997-1998, 2000-02)
Performance Institute (2000)
Regional Professional Development Center (St.Louis, MO) (2002)
Skellefteå, Sweden (2001)
Umeå, Sweden (2000-2001)

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